

Sri Lankan SEP candidate speaks to WSWs

Panini Wijesiriwardene
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is contesting the Kegalla District of Sri Lanka's Sabaragamuwa Province in the Provincial Council (PC) elections to be held on September 8.

Ananda Daulagala, 64, heads the SEP's slate of 21 candidates. He has a record of more than three decades of fighting for the program of international socialism under the banner of the International Committee of the Fourth International. He is a member of the SEP's political committee and leads the party's translation committee for the WSWs.

Daulagala joined the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the SEP's predecessor, in the wake of the bitter experiences of the 1980 general strike against the United National Party (UNP) government, which used its emergency powers to sack 100,000 public sector workers. While the RCL sought to transform the strike movement into a political struggle against the government, the trade unions, opposition parties and middle class radical organisations insisted that the strike was "non-political" and refused to challenge President Jayewardene's edicts. As a result of their treachery, the UNP carried through the sackings virtually unopposed.

Daulagala has been victimised on a number of occasions because of his principled political stance. He was arrested in 1984 during the RCL's campaign against the UNP's "White Paper" for the privatisation of education and detained for 24 days. He was dismissed, on false charges, from his job in the Department of Cooperatives. The government was ultimately forced to reinstate him, as a result of the RCL's campaign against this witch-hunt.

During 1988-89, the RCL launched a vigorous international campaign against the state violence of the UNP government and the fascistic killings by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) of working class militants and socialists. At the time, three RCL members in different parts of the island, including L. H. Gunapala, a worker at the University of Peradeniya, near Kandy, were murdered by the JVP. Daulagala, as the leader of the RCL's Kandy branch, courageously defied these violent attacks and

played a leading role in the RCL campaign for a united front of working class parties to defend the working people and youth.

Panini Wijesiriwardene (PW): What response to the SEP's election announcement have you received among workers and other sections of the poor?

Ananda Daulagala (AD): It has been a very warm response. Firstly, we had an enthusiastic welcome from SEP members and supporters. Now we are engaged in a powerful campaign with their participation. So far we have distributed several thousand copies of the election announcement in Kegalla. In the first week we met hospital workers, students and small farmers.

Most describe their terrible living conditions and express disgust toward the Rajapakse government and its austerity measures. They do not expect any change in their lives through this election. Many said that nothing had improved, three years after the end of the civil war. For them, [President Mahinda] Rajapakse's promise of peace and prosperity has been exposed as a great lie.

When we explained the real roots of the attacks they face, some of them identified the SEP as the only party that explains that this economic and political crisis flows from a global breakdown of capitalism.

Some workers and youth were very interested in our analysis of the growing rivalry between the US and China. American imperialism's attempt to defend its declining world domination through military might and its strategy of turning to the Asia-Pacific region to counter China's rise directly threatens any stability in this region. It evokes the horrendous memories that people have about US imperialism's role in Vietnam during the 1950s and 1960s.

We have explained that working people can safeguard their social and democratic rights, and defeat the threat of war, only through the building of an international revolutionary movement against imperialism and its local agents. One of the main tasks of our campaign is to initiate such a discussion, against the nationalism and parochialism of the other parties.

PW: How does your campaign differ from that of the other parties and candidates?

AD: We are the only working class party contesting in this election. We offer an internationalist program to resolve the difficulties confronted by the workers, poor and the youth. We intend to bring the problems of the people in the Kegalla area, as well as the socialist solutions to those problems, to the attention of the working people nationally, regionally and internationally, because such an international awareness and the intervention of the working class is necessary to solve these challenges.

Contrary to what the other parties say—that corruption or policy mistakes are the reason for the social problems—the SEP says that this crisis cannot be resolved under capitalism. As the leader of the SEP slate, I firmly believe in our ability to win a broad hearing from people.

PW: What attitude should working people take toward the other parties?

AW: The people know the UNP as the party that started the criminal anti-Tamil war and pro-market economic restructuring. The Sinhala chauvinist JVP served in the government with Rajapakse, worked to make him president and fully backed his renewed war. The JVP is responsible for the attacks by this government on working people and the oppressed masses.

The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and Upcountry Peoples Front (UPF) are part of the government's list of candidates. In order to divide the workers, they whip up Tamil communalism among Tamil-speaking plantation workers.

The pseudo-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP), which claim to oppose the government, have been on the same platform as the right-wing UNP. The working class and the oppressed must consider all these parties as their class enemies.

PW: Could you outline the socio-economic conditions in Kegalla district?

AD: The Kegalla district has a mixture of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people. Their occupations are also varied. They include plantation workers, public and private sector workers, small farmers, small businessmen and a large number of youth.

Even according to the official statistics, 20 percent of the district's population live below the poverty line. Many of the schools where the poorest children studied have been closed down.

Patients are forced to go to the Kurunegala General

Hospital in the adjoining district because adequate medical facilities are not available at the Kegalla General Hospital, due to funding cuts.

The government has severely gutted the fertiliser subsidy given to farmers. So this campaign is very important as an opportunity to explain that the only solution to their problems, such as land, water, fertiliser and a guaranteed price for their produce, is bound up with the fight for a socialist program under the leadership of working class.

Kegalla was a stronghold of the Pabloite Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) for decades. LSSP leader N. M. Perera represented the Ruwanwella and Yatiyanthota electorates of the Kegalla district continuously for 42 years, until 1977. That reflected the respect that the party had won during its revolutionary days. It lost that respect completely as a result of its wholesale betrayal of Trotskyism by joining the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

We represent the struggle of the socialist internationalists against that betrayal. We discuss these historical experiences in our campaign in order to educate the present generation in the great lessons of the struggle for Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which is more relevant than ever to the explosive social struggles developing on a world scale.

So, my appeal to workers and youth is to vote for the SEP and join our party, which fights for the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government as part of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally.



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